

Background

I am the manager of a childcare setting based in a school in Wrexham.

I manage a small team of 5 staff and we provide wraparound care for 3 -7 year olds and funded Early Education for children aged 3.

Although having been born in St Asaph and very proud to be Welsh, I have never, unfortunately been able to speak Welsh fluently.

Wrexham has a number of Welsh medium schools, so most Welsh speaking parents would naturally choose those schools for their children.

Our setting and indeed the school in which we are based, has children and families from many different cultures and for a large number of our families, English is not their main language.

Being based in school however, there has always been an emphasis on all children having an understanding of basic Welsh which obviously becomes more advanced as they progress through school.

This has enabled me to hear a lot of Welsh language around me in my workplace at least, albeit very basic.

As a setting, we have always used some Welsh with our children, but not so much with our parents.

We would sing a few basic Welsh songs, greet the children in Welsh (if staff remembered to do so) and obviously celebrate St David's Day, but I felt that use of Welsh in the setting had just become another box to tick, as opposed to being something that came as a natural part of our routine.

The course

As the manager of a very busy setting working 7.00am – 6.00pm, I have never had the time to attend a Welsh evening class to help me learn the language, so when the opportunity arose for me to access the Camau course, I was very interested.

I had started a Welsh course a few years ago, but quickly became disillusioned as although it claimed to be a course specifically designed for childcare and early years practitioners, it had more of an emphasis on written Welsh, which was not what I was looking for.

I was pleased to see that the Camau course was not only available online, but that it did indeed provide the level of Welsh language I required and was definitely designed for practitioners like me.

I liked the fact that I could complete it in my own time, but that support was available should I need it.

The actual content of the course was clear and I was able to access the different modules easily.

The modules weren't too lengthy or time consuming and were clearly created for those who work with young children, so I found the content relevant and appropriate for my job role.

I particularly liked the vocabulary summaries which I was able to print out and now have displayed in the setting for all staff to refer to as needed.

The videos in the course provided me with opportunities to 'hear' the language, which again was helpful to me as a learner.

Practise at the setting

No staff at our setting are Welsh speakers, but I was able to model the language skills learnt from the course and by doing so, I noticed that they were beginning to use some of the vocabulary/expressions themselves.

Lack of confidence in using the language has always held both myself and our staff back I feel, so by hearing me 'have a go' gave them the confidence to try without fear of getting anything wrong.

As I see staff confidence grow, I plan to speak to our committee to discuss asking all our staff to consider signing up for the course as part of their individual professional development.

We spend a lot of time as practitioners talking about immersing children in rich English language, so why shouldn't it be the same for Welsh?

As a setting, I now feel that our use of Welsh has increased naturally, without being forced to 'shoehorn' some kind of vocabulary into our daily activities.

Examples of how we highlight Welsh and Welsh culture at the setting are:

- **Welsh words of the week** – we choose 4 or 5 simple Welsh words that we are learning with the children and advise parents of these via our messaging app. These words may be related to a topic we have been looking at, or an event in the children's lives - for example, as we are leading up to Mother's Day this week, our words have been Mam, cariad, blodau, cwch and hapus.
- **Welsh culture bag** – I put together a bag of Welsh resources that each child can take home in turn to share with parents. Inside the bag, we have a little Welsh dolly in traditional costume, a ddraig goch soft toy, a Welsh rugby player doll, a Welsh love spoon, Welsh recipe book, Welsh story book, set of Welsh 'snap' cards and a simple Welsh puzzle. We also include a comments book for parents to complete and the feedback from this has been really positive.
- **Ticw's diary** - We have been using Ticw's diary for a number of years, but we now include a list of simple vocabulary in the front of the diary and have noticed that most parents will incorporate a few Welsh words into their diary entries, which we then read back to the children.
- **Our Star of the Week award** has now become Seren yr Wythnos – not a big change, but we now refer to it in Welsh and not English.
- **Welsh songs and rhymes** – we will now have at least 2 Welsh songs as part of our weekly routine and have observed that some of our EAL children who have not developed a lot of English language, are singing along with the Welsh words.
- **Planning** – we now incorporate some use of Welsh into our planning for all our areas of learning, whether it be counting in English and Welsh in our number activities, or referring to the Welsh colours of pens, paints etc.

We are currently halfway through a block of Diddidance sessions and have asked the dance leader to incorporate some basic Welsh instructions for the children, such as sefyll, eisteddwch, gwrando etc.

- **Welsh table** – we have just recently created our Bwrdd Cymraeg, which we plan to develop over the coming weeks. Like the Welsh culture bag, it will always have some Welsh themed soft toys, Welsh books, puzzles etc that the children can access every day as part of our Continuous Provision.
- **Dysgu Cymraeg** – all staff have been given badges to wear to show that we are all learners and are proud to use whatever words/ expressions we can when the opportunity arises.

Summary

To summarise, I would say that although it has only been myself so far that has completed the Camau course, it has definitely impacted on our practice at the setting.

It has given me the confidence to not only model Welsh language with our children and their families, but also with our staff.

My hope would be that having signed up for the Level 2 course myself, it would encourage all my staff to take up the opportunity to learn some Welsh not only for the setting, or for Estyn or CIW, but for themselves too.